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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 002521

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SUBJECT: MEETING WITH SETTLER REPRESENTATIVES

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Luis Moreno, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In coordination with Knesset Deputy Speaker Otniel Schneller, Pol Couns, EconOff and PolOff met with representatives of the settler community on November 5 to discuss the settlers' role in internal Israeli politics and the rise in settler violence. Pol Couns led off by reviewing U.S. policy on a two-state solution and GOI commitments to dismantle outposts and freeze settlements. The settlers reiterated their well-established positions: that the two-state solution is unrealistic and any peace deal must include Jordan; that the focus should be on economic development for the Palestinians; and that the settlers could learn to live with their Arab neighbors if the politicians stopped interfering. YESHA Council Chairman Danny Dayan said he is opposed to illegal outposts built on private Palestinian land. However, he emphasized his view that the majority of illegal outposts are only illegal due to "technicalities," and do not infringe Palestinian rights. He said he would vigorously oppose evacuation of these outposts. On settler violence, all the representatives condemned the actions by a few "hooligans," with Dayan calling it "the most serious issue we face." Rabbi Bin Nun claimed to have spoken out many times against violence, earning him the scorn of settler extremists. END SUMMARY.

No Change in U.S. Policy

¶2. (C) PolCouns opened the meeting by reviewing U.S. policy, underscoring our support for a two-state solution and that we see settlement activity as an obstacle to peace. He stressed that the primary interlocutor for settlers is and will remain Consulate General Jerusalem, but the Embassy is interested in an ongoing dialogue in order to understand how they the settlers see their role in internal Israeli politics and to raise U.S. concerns, including about the rising incidents of settler violence. The settlers were represented by Danny Dayan, Chairman of the Yesha council; Shaul Goldstein, Mayor of Gush Etzion; Rabbi Bin Nun of Gush Etzion; and Gila Waxman, a member of the security committee of Alfe Menashe. They were selected by MK Otniel Schneller (Kadima), who decided not to attend for fear it could become a political issue during elections if the meeting ended up in the press.

¶3. (C) The United States is committed to the two-state solution, PolCouns explained, and that was unlikely to change in the next administration. Current U.S. strategy, he said, was to support both negotiations and progress on the ground. This includes improvement in Palestinian security forces, which our IDF contacts are saying is progressing, thus allowing for closer IDF-PASF coordination and the assumption of greater security responsibilities by the PA security forces. He underlined that while the 2004 letter from President Bush to then-PM Sharon did say it was realistic for Israel to expect adjustments to the 1949 armistice lines to reflect the development of major population centers, it also called for all changes to be "mutually agreed." PolCouns

also pointed out that the U.S. expects Israel to fulfill its commitment to evacuate all post-March 2001 illegal outposts and to freeze settlement expansion.

"Politics prevents us from getting along with Palestinians"

¶4. (C) The settler representatives all said they believed that the politicians are preventing peace and, if left alone, they could get along with their Arab neighbors, although they also insisted that overall security responsibility for the West Bank must remain in Israeli hands. For example, Shaul Goldstein said he had reached out to his Arab neighbors for a joint emergency management exercise around Gush Etzion. He explained that while his Palestinian counterparts were supportive, the PA government in Ramallah prevented it. When the same groups later held a joint emergency response exercise with Efrat, Goldstein asked them what had changed. The Palestinians told him that this time they did not ask Ramallah for permission.

¶5. (C) Waxman added that Alfe Menashe, located just over the Green Line and inside the Security Barrier, provides employment for a neighboring Bedouin village that is inside the barrier. She said that left-wing activists pushed through a petition to reroute the barrier, and now these Bedouin are afraid they will not be able to get to their jobs. The Bedouin don't complain, she claimed, because they have been threatened by the Palestinian Authority to stay quiet.

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¶6. (C) Bin Nun also said that the settlements play an unpublicized role in delivering humanitarian and other forms of assistance to the Palestinians, and that there is the potential for much more to be done. He cited what the Magen David Adom (Israel's Red Cross) teams based in the settlements could do in the area of health care and emphasized the role settlements are playing in providing employment for thousands of Palestinians, as they used to do in the evacuated Gaza settlements. He noted that "Hamas has no answer for this."

"Two-state solution unrealistic, Palestinians need Jordan"

¶7. (C) Shaul Goldstein called the two-state solution unrealistic and a product of negotiators who have never visited the settlements. He said that without the IDF's presence, any Palestinian state in the West Bank would look like Gaza. The Palestinians lack the basics of infrastructure and economy, he asserted, and would have no way of earning a living on their own. Because of this, Israeli involvement could only be replaced by Jordan, which is already a Palestinian-majority state. Goldstein compared current peace efforts to Ariel Sharon's attempts in 1982 when to install pro-Israeli leadership in Lebanon with whom he could make peace. He added that not even international forces in the form of U.S. Marines could enforce that deal.

¶8. (C) Goldstein emphasized that near term efforts should focus on education and real economic development for the Palestinians. Dayan added that the Palestinians must be given their "economic" and "humanitarian" rights immediately, but they are not ready for their "political" rights. He called the Roadmap "obscene and immoral" because its first phase equates Israel's responsibility to freeze settlements with the PA's responsibility to stop terror activity. Security, he said, is the prerequisite for all other progress, and only the IDF can provide security for both peoples. The goal, Dayan said, should be to return to the situation that prevailed twenty years ago when Palestinians could work in Israel without a problem. Only total security

will allow this to take place.

¶19. (C) Rabbi Bin Nun asserted that the settlements are not obstacles to peace. Citing the over one million Israeli Arabs in Israel, he advocated allowing the settlers living outside the barrier the option of staying in an eventual Palestinian state with adequate security protection. He noted that the 1947 partition plan included leaving many Jews within the Palestinian Arab state. Bin Nun thought it would be a mistake to replay the Gaza evacuation, which destroyed Israeli communities and impoverished thousands of Palestinians employed by those settlements. He hoped that the difficulties and consequences of the Gaza evacuation would mean no one would try to repeat the experience in the West Bank, adding that he suspected that had been Sharon's intent at the time.

¶110. (C) Unlike her colleagues, Kadima-member Gila Waxman said she supported the two-state solution, but emphasized the need to keep areas like Alfe Menashe to establish defensible borders. She added that no Arabs were ever displaced for Alfe Menashe to be built. The problem, she explained, is that the Palestinians are unable to "move on" psychologically as her family had done when it was expelled from Poland, or as millions of other refugees around the world had done since the 1940's.

¶111. (C) On the illegal outposts, Dayan made a distinction between outposts that are only illegal because they lack proper approvals and those built on private Palestinian land. He said that he supports immediately evacuating outposts built on land where a Palestinian has a valid title. However, he claimed this is only the case for a small percentage of outposts. The majority, he said, are only illegal due to a legal technicality. He explained that they are only missing final bureaucratic approval from the GOI, which was withheld due to U.S. pressure. He asserted that these outposts should be legalized and he would vigorously oppose any effort to evacuate them. He believes that it is inherently undemocratic for Israel's left-wing to rely on U.S. pressure to compel the GOI to do something the government would not do otherwise, both in the case of settlements and in negotiations as a whole.

Settler violence undermines everyone

¶112. (C) PolCouns responded by explaining that there is no contradiction between economic development and a political

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settlement to the conflict, in fact they are mutually supportive. He also underscored that there is no way to delay granting Palestinians their political rights, and that all previous attempts to do so have failed. He added that settler violence undermines all of these efforts and damages Israel's reputation as a state based on the rule of law.

¶113. (C) Dayan agreed that violence, perpetrated by a few angry youths in the settlements, is extremely damaging to the settlement movement, calling it "the most serious issue that we currently face." Rabbi Bin Nun also decried the violence by "a small group of hooligans," saying that he has incurred the anger of many other settler rabbis by speaking out against the violent extremists. However, Bin Nun said that he must be careful how he addresses the issue, as their hatred stems from fear and it is impossible to hold rational discussion with these youths.

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